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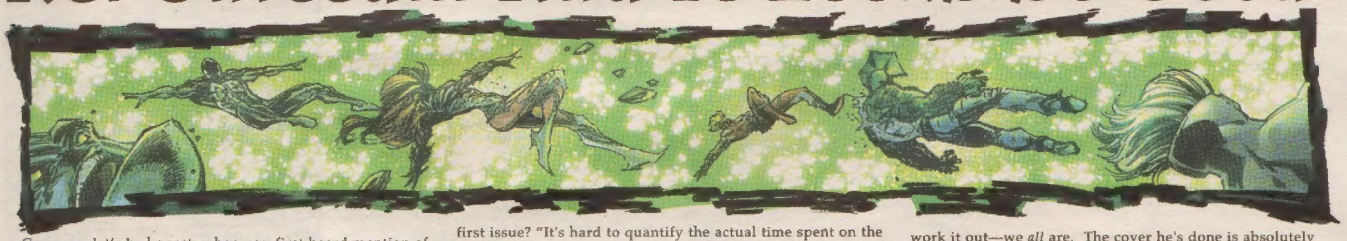
Re: United... And It Looks So Good!



Come on, let's be honest: when you first heard mention of ***Image United***, you were skeptical. Then, when you heard the ambitious plan for the book—each Image founder would illustrate every image of his creations in every panel of every issue of the comic, making this the biggest, most complex jam session in comics—you never thought you'd see it in your lifetime.

Well, Image and those six founding members have proven you wrong!

Written by *Robert Kirkman* and illustrated by *Erik Larsen, Rob Liefeld, Todd McFarlane, Whilce Portacio, Marc Silvestri, & Jim Valentino*, ***Image United*** #1 is available right now. Even better, the series is far enough into production that readers are likely to see the entire series wrap up in the spring of 2010—right on time!

While there were many who doubted that ***Image United*** would ever become more than a comics reader's fantasy, one person who was confident that it could be done was *Robert Kirkman*. The successful writer of ***Walking Dead*** and ***Invincible*** (two of Image's best-selling books) supplied the story that brought all the characters—and their famous creators—together.

Just how much of a logistic challenge was it to pull off a project like this? "It was extremely difficult, but at the same time, I think all involved would agree, extremely worth it," Kirkman said. "Keeping track of pages and where things were at all times and where pages needed to be shipped next was difficult at times. *Eric Stephenson* and *Joe Keatinge* at Image helped out a great deal with keeping those ships running smoothly.

"For the actual artists involved, all of these guys have other commitments, so carving out the time to do this was difficult—but to their credit each one of them have stepped up and delivered beyond my wildest dreams. I honestly think this series houses work by all involved that will be counted among their best stuff. It's a beautiful book!"

The project is unprecedented in its scope: not only will each Image founder illustrate every appearance of his own characters in the series, but each founder will provide layouts for one of the six issues. (Considering how much bristol board has to move back and forth, perhaps FedEx should be listed in the credits!) "This is really one of the things only we can do," *Erik Larsen* said at a 2008 Image panel discussion. "You can't go to Marvel and get the definitive guys for a crossover—you can't get *Jack Kirby*, you can't get *Steve Ditko*—but you *can* get us doing our definitive takes on our definitive characters."

So just how long did it take to finish up the art for the first issue? "It's hard to quantify the actual time spent on the book simply because of the time involved with shipping and all the other logistics," Kirkman said. "The first issue was worked on over the span of many months—but at the same time, people were working on multiple issues, so things overlapped quite a bit. Actual, work time—if everyone was sitting in the same room, I would guess it would take about two weeks to produce an entire issue. What makes this project possible, is that none of these guys are actually doing a full issue worth of work. At best, when it's all said and done there's about two, maybe two and a half issues worth of work for each individual artist."

The shared workload, along with careful logistical planning, is the secret to the book's scheduling success. "By the time the first issue ships I'll be completely done," Kirkman said. "We'll be working on issue six by the time issue one is in stores. I'm confident that the series will hit all it's scheduled ship dates. Everyone is hard at work on this series to ensure that we do in fact, ship it on time. We're working on issues three through five simultaneously right now."

Last month, Image announced that the miniseries' villain would be none other than Al Simmons, the original Spawn—and that led some to tag ***Image United*** as "Image's ***Blackest Night.***" Robert Kirkman rejects the analogy, however. "Comic fans seem to thrive on being able to compare something to something else, especially when they know nothing of the project. Much like ***Blackest Night*** is unfairly compared to ***Marvel Zombies***, ***Image United*** is nothing like ***Blackest Night***. Al Simmons coming back from the 'dead' is really nothing new—that happened in the first issue of *Spawn*. The fact that he's back isn't really important--*why* he is back is what this series is about. I think readers are in for a shock. I've got some tricks up my sleeve on this one."

And speaking of tricks up his sleeve, Kirkman and the Image team successfully completed one of the most impressive tricks of the year: they enticed *Jim Lee* (whose WildStorm was a part of Image before joining the DC family) to supply a cover for the series' premiere issue. How much maneuvering did it take to make this happen? "Jim was anxious to participate," Kirkman said. "I've been pestering him for the better part of a year, trying to get him to work something out with DC so he could be involved. I'm thrilled that he was able to work it out—we *all* are. The cover he's done is absolutely amazing." So amazing, in fact, that it's being offered in two versions: a standard color piece and a limited 1-for-100 sketch version spotlighting Lee's stunning pencil work.

Is there any chance that Lee might sneak in an interior panel or two as well? "There are currently no plans for that now... but if anyone has any dirt on Jim they'd like to share I'm not beyond blackmailing the guy. The fact is, Jim is a DC guy now, with DC commitments. Jim's got more Batman to draw. That said, if he found himself up late at night with nothing to do and a hankering to do some drawing... he should give me a call. We'll find *something* for him to do..."

Initially, Image intended to offer each of the book's six founder-illustrated covers in equal proportion; after listening to requests from readers and retailers, however, they changed their plans and made each cover individually orderable. Kirkman explained the strategy behind the covers. "Like all big projects these days, yes, ***Image United*** will have multiple covers for each and every issue. It's going to be awesome. The covers were made available individually because we know that some people are going to want to want to pick which cover they want and not everyone is going to want the same cover, which could lead to uneven stock of the various covers, so we gave retailers the ability to order accordingly."

Need yet another reason to add ***Image United*** to your must-read list? Howsabout an original ***Haunt*** backup story? The six-page backup story by *Robert Kirkman, Greg Capullo, Ryan Ottley, Todd McFarlane, & FCO Plascencia* takes place between the events of ***Haunt #s 3 & 4***, showcasing brothers Daniel and Kurt as they try to figure out how to use their new power. (And this truly is a bonus gift, since readers will get every page of story and art originally intended for ***Image United*** as well as the six-page extra.)

Image United #1, a $3.99 comic featuring seven variant covers by *Erik Larsen, Jim Lee, Rob Liefeld, Todd McFarlane, Whilce Portacio, Marc Silvestri, & Jim Valentino* (as well as a blank cover edition for fans who'd like to supply their own art or get a convention sketch in the future) and a 1-for-100 *Jim Lee* incentive cover, is slated for release this week.

by Cliff Biggers

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

COMIC SHOP NEWSARAMA

Produced by *Comic Shop News* in cooperation with *newsarama.com*

CSNsider

•San Diego Comic-Con founder *Shel Dorf* died on November 3rd due to complications of diabetes. Dorf, who launched his first San Diego convention in 1970, contributed more than any other convention organizer to the expansion of the comic book convention from a niche market event to a major media spectacular.

•*David Goyer's* script for ***Ghost Rider 2*** will pick up eight years after the events of the first ***Ghost Rider*** film and will star *Nicolas Cage*, who also starred in the first film. "It doesn't contradict anything that happened in the first film," Goyer told MTV, "It's as if you took that same character where things ended in the first film and then picked it up eight years later—he's just in a much darker, existential place."

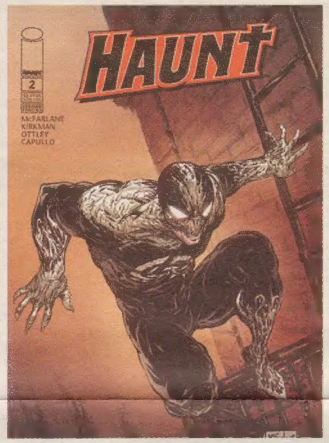
•*Helen Mirren* has joined the cast of ***Red***, the *Bruce Willis*-starring film based on *Warren Ellis's* espionage thriller published by WildStorm/DC. Also in talks to appear in the film are *Mary Louise Parker* and *John C. Reilly;* the film is tentatively slated for November 2010 release.

•Yen Press has landed the rights to adapt *James Patterson's* ***Daniel X*** in manga form; the adaptations will first appear in ***Yen Plus***, their manga anthology magazine, before being collected in solo volumes (the same format that was used for their ***Maximum Ride*** adaptation). The series seems ideally suited for comics, since it focuses on a teenage alien hunter who finds out that he, too, is an alien with the power to create things merely by thinking about them. Korean artist *Seung-hui Kye* will supply the art.

•DC Unlimited has cancelled all orders for ***World of Warcraft Premium Series 2 Action Figures*** and ***World of Warcraft Series 6 Action Figures;*** these figures will be resolicited for July 2010 release.

•Marvel has a couple of previously-unannounced Christmasy Hulk offerings in the works: there's a 1-for12 *Ed McGuinness* Santa-Hulk variant for ***Hulk #18***, as well as a percentage-of-orders-linked *Ed McGuinness* Santa Hulk variant of ***Fall of the Hulks Gamma.***

•Marvel has added ***Fantastic Four Annual #12*** to the contents of ***Marvel Masterworks: Inhumans HC Vol 2;*** the price remains the same, in spite of the extra 36 pages.



Back to Press

•***Doom Patrol #4 2nd Printing*** (OCT098005), featuring a recolored version of the original cover, in stores 12/3.

•***Booster Gold #26 2nd Printing*** (OCT098013), featuring a recolored version of the original cover, in stores 12/3.

•***REBELS #10 2nd Printing*** (OCT098011), featuring a recolored version of the original cover, in stores 12/3.

•***Batman and Robin #2 4th Printing*** (OCT098007), featuring a recolored version of the original cover, in stores 12/3.

•***Haunt #1 3rd Printing,*** in stores 12/3.

•***Haunt #2 2nd Printing,*** in stores 12/3.

Marvelous Land of Oz #1 2nd Printing (SEP098244), featuring a new cover by *Skottie Young*, in stores 12/9.

•***New Mutants 2nd Printing*** (SEP098243), in stores 12/16.

•***X-Necrosha 2nd Printing*** (SEP098245), in stores 12/16.

Coming Comics—Dark Horse in February

Dark Horse joins forces with Retro-A-Go-Go to present a variety of ***Buck Rogers*** odds 'n' ends, including collectible frames, belt buckles, metal cases, key chains, and more.

Acclaimed novelist and comics writer *Brad Meltzer* signs on as writer of "Twilight," a five-part arc that begins in ***Buffy the Vampire Slayer #32.*** In the aftermath of her battle with Twilight's army, Buffy has developed a host of new powers—but when will the other shoe drop? Meanwhile, still reeling from the losses of war, Willow goes looking for missing allies and discovers a horrifying truth about several of the Slayer army's recent ordeals in this storyline that also reveals Twilight's true identity.

Jerry Robinson reworks and updates his classic ***The Comics: An Illustrated History of Comic Strip Art,*** an insightful, fact-filled look at the origins and evolutions of comic strips from the pre-***Yellow Kid*** days to the present, focusing on such luminaries as *Milt Caniff, Walt Kelly, Hal Foster,* and *Winsor McCay,* among others. And if there's anyone who knows comics, it's *Jerry Robinson*, the man who created the Joker!

Manga artist *Torajiro Kishi* and anime studio *Madhouse* present their first original, Western-style comic in the pages of ***Devil***, a thrilling, sci-fi take on the vampire genre. A virus is raging across the planet, turning people into bloodsucking superhumans referred to as "Devils." Most victims die within days, sometimes months, but there's a new strain, a new class of Devil that threatens to overtake mankind with power and bloodthirst. This new class of Devils derive from an experiment to clone a virus victim, and it looks like science has created a true monster this time. Can Takimoto and the Devil Investigation Section of the Tokyo police force stop this societal scourge?

Dark Horse expands its Gelaskins line of laptop and iPhone skins with new designs featuring characters from *Tim Burton* and Weta Collectibles' ***Dr. Grordbort.***

Vampire Hunter D Reader's Guide, a 240-page trade paperback, offers a collection of rare artwork by *Yoshitaka Amano* and interviews with Amano & *Hideyuki Kikuchi*, that shed light on the inspirations for the series. The book also features sneak peeks from upcoming novels, an extensive dictionary, exclusive sketches, and more.

Dark Horse collected volumes include:

•***Achewood Volume 3: A Home for Scared People HC,*** the third compendium of *Chris Onstad's* web hit ***Achewood.***

•***Aliens: More Than Human,*** collecting the story arc by John *Arcudi, Zach Howard, & Mark Irwin.*

•***The Book of Grickle HC,*** collecting the best of *Graham Annable's* alternately poetic, funny, and offbeat comics, along with a selection of new material.

•***The Chronicles of Kull Volume 2: The Hell***

SPIDER-MAN BY STAN LEE & LARRY LIEBER

THANKS TO SANDMAN, THE COPS CAN'T STOP US FROM REACHING OUR CAR!
HUH? THE HANDLE'S STICKY! CAN'T OPEN IT!
THAT'S THE IDEA!
STAN LEE LARRY LIEBER 11-19
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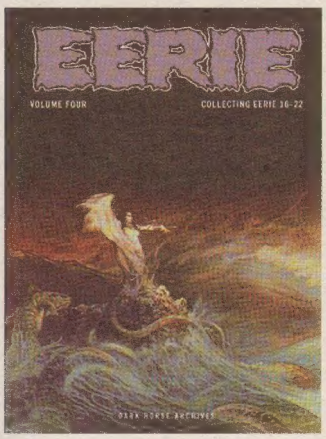
Beneath Atlantis & Other Stories TP, collecting ***Kull the Conqueror #10*** and ***Kull the Destroyer #s 11-20*** in their original colors, digitally cleaned and remastered.



- ***Eerie Archives Volume 4 HC,*** collecting ***Eerie #s 16-20 ,*** featuring material by *Frank Frazetta, Steve Ditko, John Severin, Gene Colan, Angelo Torres,* and others.
- ***Rapture TP,*** collecting the limited series by *Michael Avon Oeming & Taki Soma.*
- ***The Savage Sword of Conan Volume 7 TP,*** collecting classic black-and-white Conan tales from ***Savage Sword of Conan #s 72-84,*** featuring work by *Chris Claremont, Michael Fleisher, Bruce Jones, John Buscema, Alfredo Alcala, Ernie Chan,* and others.
- ***Star Wars: Dark Times Volume 4—Blue Harvest TP,*** collecting ***Star Wars: Dark Times #s 13-17,*** featuring a tale set three months after the events of ***Revenge of the Sith.***
- ***Star Wars: The Old Republic Volume 1—Threat of Peace TP,*** collecting ***Star Wars: The Old Republic #s 1-27,*** previously available only at the swtor.com website.
- ***Star Wars Omnibus: Boba Fett TP,*** a 496-page compendium of all things Boba.
- ***The Tale of One Bad Rat HC,*** a deluxe hardcover edition of *Bryan Talbot's* acclaimed and insightful look into the life of a sexually abused child, complete with a new foreword by *Neil Gaiman,* updated background material, plus entirely new color separations that better highlight Talbot's art.
- ***Witchfinder: In the Service of Angels TP,*** collecting the five-issue series by *Mike Mignola, Ben Stenbeck, & Dave Stewart,* along with two bonus tales.
- ***Wondermark Volume 3: Dapper Caps & Pedal-Copters HC,*** a 96-page collection of more than 100 strips by *David Malki* originally published in ***The Onion*** and on wondermark.com, plus many pages of additional material by Malki.

Remender's Punisher Makes the Cut

Think you know all there is to know about Frank Castle, aka the Punisher? Well, if you haven't read *Rick Remender's* ***Punisher #10*** and ***Dark Reign: The List—The Punisher,*** then you've missed out on some major changes involving Marvel's vigilante anti-hero.

Remender offered a synopsis for readers who haven't yet seen the Punisher's bloody fate (and if you don't want to know what happens, you might want to consider the rest of this article one big spoiler and move on to the next story!). "When the Punisher, AKA Frank Castle, realized that the psychotic Norman Osborn was becoming the most powerful man in the Marvel Universe, he knew he had to do something," Remender said. "Being Frank, the veteran soldier simply declared war on the former Green Goblin's Dark Reign. In ***Punisher" #1,*** Castle fired the opening shot in that war as he tried to assassinate Osborn with a sniper rifle. The assassination attempt ultimately failed—but by pulling the trigger, Castle embarked upon a vendetta that would ultimately cost him everything.

"Castle's war against Osborn quickly attracted the attention of the former Green Goblin's associate and fellow Cabal member The Hood, the head of the Marvel Universe's supervillain underworld. In ***Punisher #10,*** Castle walked away from his last battle with The Hood, but he was not unscathed. The supervillain capo corrupted the one thing in the world that was sacred to Frank Castle; his memory of his slain family.

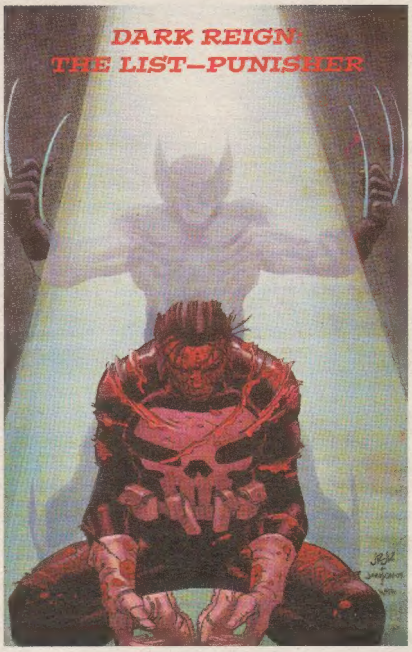
"Then, in the one-shot ***Dark Reign: The List—Punisher,*** Norman Osborn escalated his war against Frank Castle by attacking him with the full might of the intelligence agency H.A.M.M.E.R. (formerly S.H.I.E.L.D.) and the Dark Avenger Daken, Wolverine's son. It was a strategy that proved successful, because at the end of the issue, Frank Castle had been cut to pieces by Daken."

As it turns out, "cut to pieces" isn't hyperbole: Frank Castle is literally sliced 'n' diced in this brutal tale. But why? "It was important to me that Frank's involvement in ***Dark Reign*** play out to it's natural conclusion, which is that Frank was outclassed," Remender said. "Frank has never really gone after someone as big as Osborn, in terms of his current power level in the Marvel Universe. There was no way Frank was walking away from this.

"At the end, though, it wasn't like Frank dropped his weapon and quit. Daken is slicing him to pieces, and Frank pulls out a knife and keeps coming at him. Frank is blinded, his throat cut open, and his guts shredded, but he doesn't stop till… he keeps coming until he's just a torso with legs.

"It was important that he fought as long and hard as he could against Daken. It *had* to be a death worthy of Frank Castle. At that point, we picked a hole in the Marvel Universe we don't see very often and dropped Frank into it. And it fit like a glove."

Doesn't this totally change the entire Punisher dynamic, advancing the character from a well-armed vengeance-seeking vigilante to something more—or less—than human? "When Frank Castle is reborn in 'FrankenCastle,' he's noticeably not the same man, returning from the dead with memory problems and a variety of other issues," Remender said. "Whatever it is that comes back in issue #11 is something that's had its brain and heart destroyed. ***Punisher #10*** was the destruction of Frank Castle's soul—and then in ***The List,*** his body is killed. Norman and the Hood succeeded when it comes to Frank. They knocked him completely off the playing field. Where Frank finds himself is this very strange situation that allows us to see the fabric of who he is. Whatever FrankenCastle is, it's an external representation of the monster inside Frank."



Is this a permanent change, or is there some secret scheme to return Frank to his pre-SlapChop state at some point point in the

Continued on page 6

SO, BIGTIME--YOU TEAMED UP WITH SANDMAN IN THE BANK HEIST.
YEAH. IT'S HARD TO GET GOOD HELP THESE DAYS.
I DON'T WANNA FIGHT YOU, WALL-CRAWLER.
OH YES, YOU DO, MARKO--
AND YOU KNOW WHY!
YEAH, GUESS I DO.
STAN LEE LARRY LIEBER 11-20
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I DON'T GET IT, MAN-- WHY'D YOU TEAM UP WITH A RAT LIKE BIGSHOT?
CAN'T EXPLAIN!
I HAD TO DO IT!
=UNHH=
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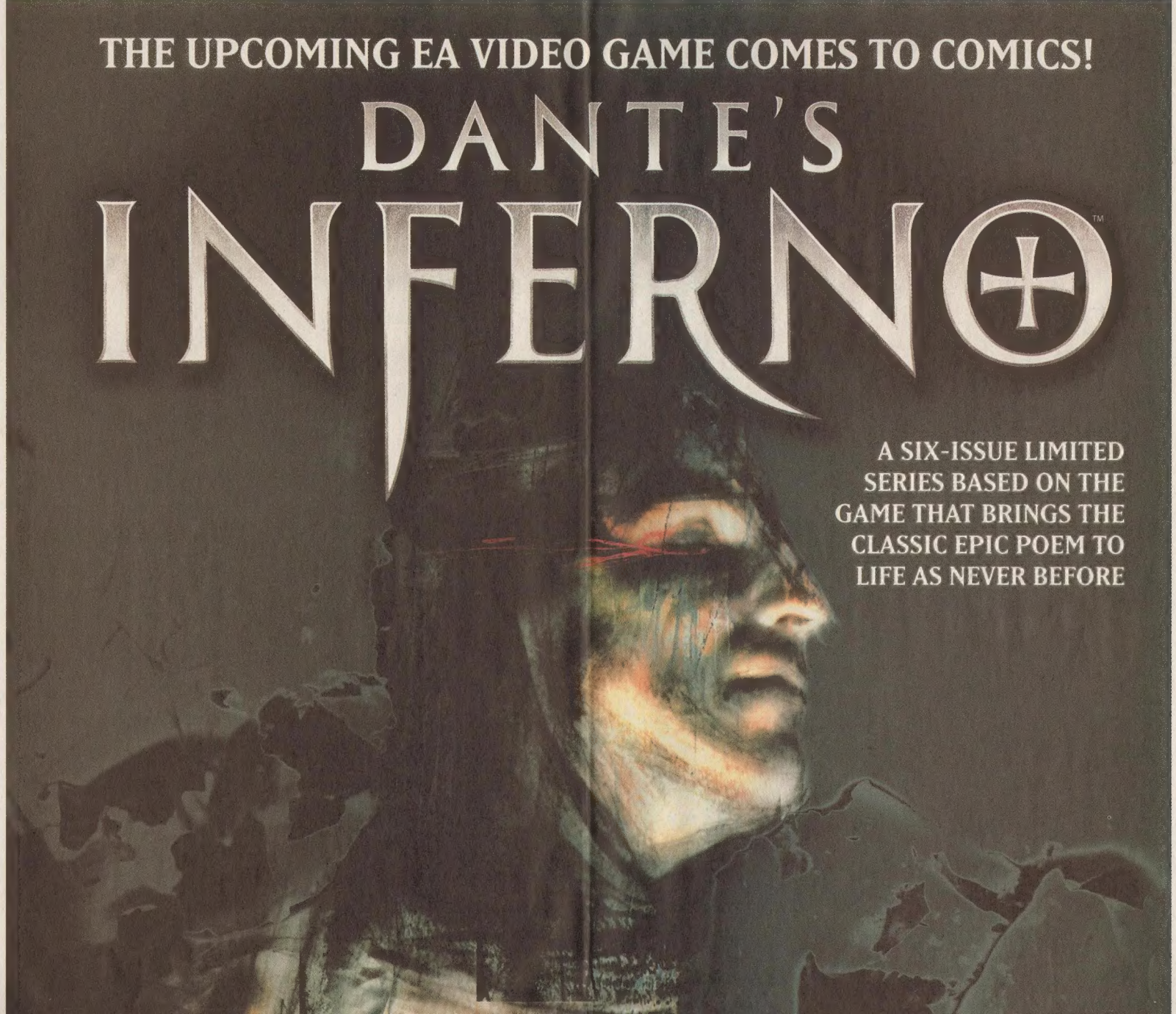

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future? "As long as I'm writing the book, this will play a role," Remender said. "The next few arcs we have planned out revolve around this new Punisher and his continuing mission to murder up some bad type folks. The FrankenCastle arc is a very strange journey for Frank, but one he walks away from with a new perspective on a few things. When he rises from this particular sewer he's going to kill many people on his bad list. The events of the first ten issue and ***The List*** were the beginning; this is all *far* from over."

Will this also impact the way the Punisher deals with others in the Marvelverse in the future? "Yes," Remender said. "He's going to be able to do some things he couldn't before. He's going to be able to stand against some sons of bitches he didn't previously have much hope of taking down. Frank's got some big, messy stuff coming up."

Readers who miss the old, all-too-human Frank Castle won't be deprived of their favorite skull-wearing anti-hero, however, as none of these changes will carry over into the new ***PunisherMAX*** series. " ***Max*** is its own thing, its own universe and all of that—which is great, if you don't think Frank should co-exist with men full up of radioactive spider blood and cosmic dudes riding surf boards, ***PunisherMax*** is a hardcore, hard boiled noir fest done by the best guys in comics for such things, *Jason Aaron and Steve Dillon*."

The pivotal ***Dark Reign: The List—The Punisher,*** which has sold out of its first printing, will return to comic shops in early December in a second edition. ***The Punisher #11*** is slated for late November release.

See the Phantom 'n' Action

Toy collectors old enough to remember the original Captain Action figures will recall that the Phantom was one of the original costumes offered for the changeable hero. The "meeting" occurred again in the 1990s when Playing Mantis reissued the Captain Action figures, and once more with the Cast-a-Way 8" Mego-Sized Captain Action figures. That was as close as Captain Action and the Phantom came to crossing over, however... until now.

Moonstone Books and Captain Action Enterprises are preparing a ***Phantom/Captain Action*** limited series that will team up Captain Action and the legendary comic strip costumed hero. In this new adventure, the Phantom is captured and his wife Diana pleads with Captain Action to help. "It turns out the young Captain Action has had a crush on Diana since his teenage years, so that makes for an interesting dynamic", series writer *Mike Bullock* said. The two-issue mini-series is pencilled by *Reno* and offers a variety of covers by artists *Art Thibert, Mark Sparacio,* and *Michael T. Gilbert.*

"For this story, the premise is that they've known each other before," Captain Action Enterprises' *Ed Catto* told ***CSN.*** "The original idea I had was a 1960s tale. The Phantom is captured, and Diana turns to her old boyfriend, who is actually Captain Action, to save her current boyfriend, the Ghost who Walks! I wanted to develop a whole riff where their romance had ended badly years ago... a little Casablanca-ish.

"King Features liked the idea but preferred to keep it contemporary. So in our story, which starts in starts in NYC at the UN and then does a little globetrotting, Diana calls Captain Action, an old family friend. But her call goes through to his son (who is the main protagonist in our ongoing series). And it turns out he always had a crush on Diana. So, we'll still get to have some fun with it."

While Captain Action and the Phantom are the stars of the series, "their supporting characters will come into play," Catto said. "We have the 'original' Captain Action mostly off-stage, but our new Lady Action does show up with a few surprises. We really give Diana a lot to do too—she's really not the shrinking violet/damsel in distress here."

"My dad has always been a big Phantom fan," Captain Action Enterprises' Catto said. "As a boy, he just loved the Whitman 1944 ***Phantom*** book and the weekly Sunday strip. I know I was reading too much into it, but as a child I felt there was some sort of father-son legacy when I dressed my original Captain Action as the Phantom."

"This adventure has essentially been in the making by fans for over forty years. We're glad we could make it 'real' by publishing it, at last!" Moonstone Publisher *Joe Gentile* said.

Phantom/Captain Action #1, a $3.99 comic that kicks off the two-part series, is slated for March 2010 release.

Alimentary, My Dear Watson

Sherlock Holmes has faced off against a number of adversaries , but malevolent murderers and diabolical geniuses have nothing on the adversaries that the erudite Mr. Holmes confronts in ***Victorian Undead,*** the Wildstorm limited series produced by *Ian Edginton & Davide Fabbri.*

Ian Edginton told ***CSN*** just what sort of death-defying mystery Holmes must solve in the six-parter. "The series starts off low-key, with Holmes and Watson drawn into a seemingly innocuous murder-mystery by a baffled Inspector Lestrade," Edginton explained. "It soon becomes apparent however, that this is something out of the ordinary when one of the recently deceased refuses to stay dead and has developed a penchant for live human flesh.

"Before you know it, the streets of London are swarming with ravenous revenants in a plague of Biblical proportions that threatens to spread beyond the capitol and consume the country. While the army is fighting a desperation action just to hold these creatures back, it falls to Holmes to solve the mystery of their origin, their purpose and who is behind it all."

While the zombie angle has a strong appeal in today's comics market, it's the Holmes aspect of the story that Edginton finds most attractive. "I don't think it would be an understatement to say that I am an enthusiastic Holmes fan! In my mid 'teens, I came down with a bout of glandular fever which lasted months. It wasn't an especially serious but it just left me feeling exhausted out all the time. It was also extremely boring. We didn't have DVD's a VCR or cable back then and at the time, terrestrial TV in the UK only had a handful of channels. So I just read and read and read.

"I went through one huge slab of a book that contained the entire Holmes canon. I remember reading it in just under a week, then going back and reading it again. That's when I got hooked on Holmes—and the influence has stayed with me ever since! When I was writing ***Scarlet Traces*** and ***Scarlet Traces: The Great Game*** – my sequel to *HG Wells'* ***War of the Worlds*** – despite the steampunk trappings, they are both, detective stories at heart. I was a frustrated Holmesian!

"Funnily enough, the last eighteen months has seen me pretty much immersed in the Holmes stories again. As well as ***Victorian Undead,*** I am currently adapting the entire Holmes canon into a series of graphic novels for Self Made Hero here in the UK. They specialize in adapting literary classics. I'm working with an artist friend of mine, *Ian Culbard,* with whom I recently adapted the ***Picture of Dorian Gray.*** We're working through the novels first, then the short stories. ***The Hound of the Baskervilles*** is already out. ***A Study in Scarlet*** is out early in the new year, ***The Sign of Four*** next spring and ***The Valley of Fear*** late autumn."

In the hands of a lesser writer, it would be easy for a Holmes-versus-zombies story to become a splatterpunk misadventure, but Edginton was determined to avoid letting the tale get out of control. "When it comes to Holmes and the zombies (good band name!) I wanted to play it straight and not like one of the 'zombies meet classic works of literature' pastiches that are doing the rounds at the moment, as fun as they are. I want to story to have its own rationale, to have an internal logic to it that makes sense – as far as such a thing can. The zombies are there for a reason, and it's down to Holmes to find out what before it's too late."

While Edginton isn't willing to name the villain responsible for the undead plague terrorizing London, he assures Holmes aficionados that "I don't think it's a real stretch to imagine who might be the 'big bad' behind it all."

Not only are readers likely to see members of Holmes' supporting cast in the series, but there might be some pleasant surprises for *Arthur Conan Doyle* readers. "If characters have appeared in any other of Doyle's works," Edginton said, "then they too might show their faces in a brief cameo or walk-on part, public domain permitting!"

Don't look for characters from other works of Victorian literature, however. "The last thing I want this to be is ***League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*** lite," Edginton said. "There will be some steampunk chicanery along the way, but primarily it's Holmes versus those darned zombies! I think that adding any more characters other than Doyle's own would just muddy the story and slow it down."

As any writer who's ever delved into the fictional world of Doyle's famous detective

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knows, Holmes devotees can be notoriously demanding regarding fidelity to the master's interpretation of his iconic characters. Will Edginton remain faithful to the Sherlock Holmes that readers have come to know and love, or will there be some changes in store for Holmes and Watson? "His character will be affected by the events in the series, but primarily Holmes will be as he is written in the Doyle stories. He is arrogant, quick-witted, shrewd, abrasive, given to dark moods and great leaps of genius.

"There is also a physicality to him that often gets overlooked amidst all the pipe-smoking, drug taking, and violin playing. For example, in the novel ***The Sign of Four*** we discover Holmes went three rounds with the prizefighter McMurdo who said Holmes had missed his calling as boxer.

"Watson, too, is played as he was meant to be and not the buffoon that he used to be thought of thanks to *Nigel Bruce's* performance opposite *Basil Rathbone's* Holmes. Watson was an army surgeon, a professional soldier who fought and was severely wounded in the Battle of Maiwand, one of the bloodiest battle of the second Afghan War. There is a vitality to Holmes and Watson that I feel often gets overlooked, so I've tried to put some of that back."

Doyle often constructed his stories as an early version of the 'play fair' mystery, with all the clues for the solution presented in the tale so that the reader could attempt to solve the case along with Holmes. Is Edginton continuing that tradition with ***Victorian Undead***? " To a degree, yes. There are plenty of clues laid down for people to pick up on and we do foreshadow later events early in the series so you can see how the mystery unfolds."

Writing ***The Victorian Undead*** not only requires fidelity to Doyle's Holmes, it also requires a degree of verisimilitude regarding the Victorian setting itself. "Getting the period feel is important," Edginton said. "However, artist *Davide Fabbri* and I both decided early on that we weren't going to break into panic if we got the wrong type of gas lamp or door handle. This isn't a BBC period drama or a Merchant/Ivory film, it's Holmes battling against hordes of zombies! We do out best but if you're after precise period realism, perhaps this book isn't for you! "

Does Edginton have any theories as to why Holmes seems to be undergoing such a comic book resurgence lately? And how do the various comic book interpretations of Holmes stack up to the original? "That's a wide ranging subject to discuss!" Edginton remarked. "Fundamentally, Holmes is a great character. A deeply flawed but charismatic genius who we would find it hard to like were he not filtered through the perceptions of Doctor Watson. Watson doesn't shy away from recording with dismay, Holmes shockingly arrogant personality, his dark moods and distressing addiction.

"Likewise, we also marvel along with him as he witnesses first hand, Holmes astonishing deductions and analysis of various crimes in the face of insubstantial or often conflicting evidence.

" As for the comics—this is a sweeping generalization I know, but apart from *Leah Moore and John Reppion's* recent series, which I greatly enjoyed, I haven't really found a Holmes comic story that was up to much. Now, if I'm missing a gem that's out there somewhere I'm more than happy to eat my words if someone would tell me what it is!

"What I've found is that Holmes pastiche comic stories tend to embrace the cliché with both hands. As I said earlier, there's a physicality to the characters that often gets overlooked—but my bug-bear is the bloody Deer Stalker and Inverness Cape! They are country clothes and wouldn't be worn in the town—it just wasn't the done thing!

"As for adaptations of the Holmes stories, they always seem to be to tightly abridged and crammed into to few pages. When I'm adapting the Holmes novels for Self Made Hero, we've tried to keep the page count somewhere between 120 and 130 pages. I still have to edit a good deal out but at that length, it means you cam retain more of a flavor of Doyle's original work, not to mention giving the artist plenty of shoulder room to do his stuff!"

If ***Victorian Undead*** does well, can readers look forward to more Holmes tales from Edginton and Wildstorm? "Oh, yes! I have two more miniseries fleshed out and ready to roll as soon as the word is given!"

Victorian Undead #1 is now available in your friendly neighborhood comic shop.

We Toad You So!

A few weeks ago, we told you that *Mike Mignola, John Arcudi, & Guy Davis* had a big ending planned for their current ***BPRD*** "Frog War" saga—and the beginning of that end is almost here!

January's ***BPRD: King of Fear #1*** launches the conclusion of the Frog War as it wraps up BPRD's Scorched Earth trilogy that begin with ***The Warning*** and continued in ***The Black Goddess.*** Recently, writer *John Arcudi* told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Chris Arrant* what he had in store for readers with this final miniseries. "It's about the beginning of the end. At the same time, it really *is* the end of the Frog War continuity. We're going to wrap that up in a way that will, we hope, give long-time BPRD readers a feeling of satisfaction. They've made it to the end of a story line. But, as in life, endings creates all kinds of difficulties. The BPRD's work is far from finished."

For readers who know Hellboy and his comrades-in-arms only through the films, Arcudi offered a rundown on the BPRD. "The BPRD is a government organization that's been investigating—and defending human beings from—harmful paranormal activities in the world since 1947. Hellboy left the BPRD some years back, and since then the Bureau has primarily been battling a giant 'Frog' invasion. These strange amphibious creatures are linked to major supernatural forces trying to turn the earth into a breeding ground for the new generation of monster gods. The Frogs are sort of like advance ground forces in a war, and the thinking of the BPRD is, defeat them, and strike a blow to the enemy."

In their most recent limited series, the BPRD burned their bridges with the United States government—so how does the BPRD operate now? "Not so differently from the way they did before, but just with a smaller budget," Arcudi said. "Given, however, that they have Liz Sherman, fire goddess, that's probably not so big of a deal. They can still kick ass. Liz in particular kicks a lot of ass—way more than she should, as it turns out."

At the end of ***The Black Goddess,*** it appeared that the BPRD had two missions to undertake: one to put an end to the frog menace, the other to save Lobster Johnson's soul. Is the latter mission the one that Kate will focus on? "Right—she's after peace for Lobster Johnson's soul. Johann's ectoplasm has been commandeered by the Lobster's spirit," Arcudi said. "He's not malicious about it, in fact, the spirit is disoriented. His body is buried in Austria, and Kate is just trying to help the Lobster's ghost find his way."

Will this resolve everything regarding the Frog Menace saga, which dates all the way back to the original ***Hellboy: Seed of Destruction*** miniseries? "Everything? Well, no," Arcudi said. "There are a few little threads we'll be picking up later, things some readers might now believe to be insignificant. But it *does* tie up the larger threads rather neatly. The Liz story line is resolved, and the Lobster story reaches completion, and other things, too. But the BPRD is a sprawling history book that carries through lots of character development from series-to-series. We can't have everything come back to square one at the end of every arc—we can't have characters return to the way they were in the first issue of that arc. This is not a super-hero book that has to maintain a status quo. Things are changing."

BPRD: King of Fear #1 is slated for mid-January release.

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SANDMAN! WASTE SPIDER-MAN-- IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOUR KID!
I WON'T COMMIT MURDER--BUT I CAN DO--
--THIS!
HE'S BECOME-- A LIVING SANDSTORM!
SAND! ALL AROUND ME! HARD TO BREATHE--!
GETTING DIZZY-- BLACKING OUT...
I HAD TO DO IT, SPIDER-MAN--
--SO THAT BIGSHOT WON'T HARM MY CHILD!
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